



Leadership roles present exciting opportunities for career advancement, personal growth and fulfilment. (Shutterstock)

## Ready for the next step in your career? Here's how to get ready for your first leadership position

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At the age of 20, Leda, one of the authors of this story, was terrified when asked to supervise a team of older and more experienced colleagues. The first few months weren't easy, but the experience eventually became a turning point in her life.

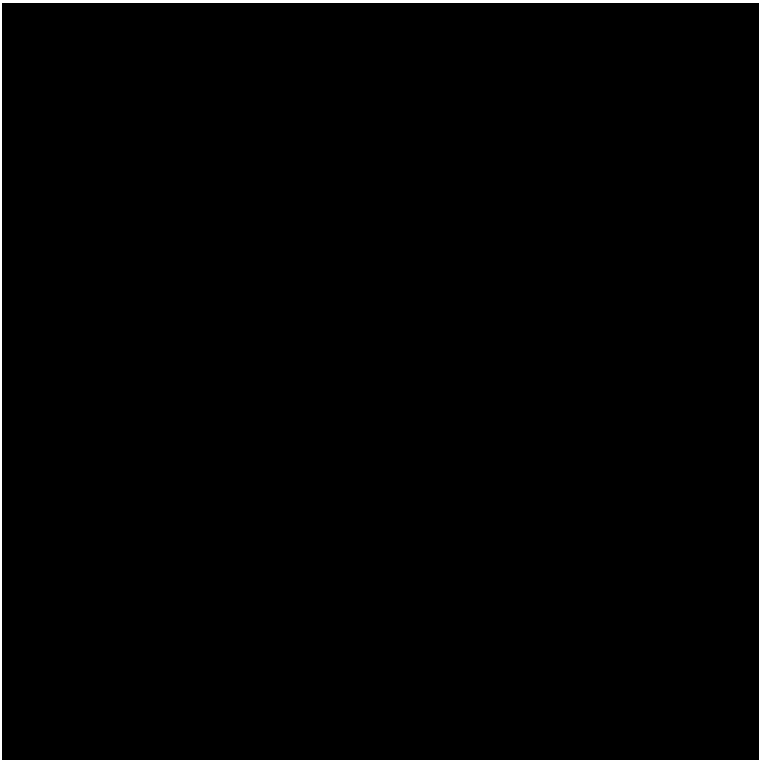
Leadership roles present exciting opportunities for career advancement, personal growth and fulfilment. Beyond the appeal of higher salaries, the positions offer the chance to drive change, mentor others and enhance your interpersonal skills.

However, feeling apprehensive about taking this significant step in your career is natural. You're not alone — between 74 to 83 per cent of leaders feel unprepared for their roles, and many capable individuals decline promotions due to concerns about their readiness and potential changes in how they are perceived by others.

Whether you're stepping into the C-suite or your first team lead role, the prospect of leading others can be daunting. So, how can you confidently make the leap into a leadership position?

While there are steps you can take independently to prepare, leveraging your professional network will be crucial for building confidence and achieving success.

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### Using your professional network

Your professional network comprises people you’re connected to at your workplace, such as peers and supervisors. It also includes people from former jobs, social interactions and events.

As these connections progress in their careers, many will enter leadership roles, becoming invaluable parts of your network and social capital — provided you stay in touch.



To make the most of your professional network, take the time to reflect on what you are learning and, most importantly, how you are feeling. (Shutterstock)

A strong professional network offers numerous benefits, particularly when preparing for leadership roles. Here are three ways your professional network can help:

**1. Your professional network can guide you toward leadership roles that fit you.**

Beyond informing you of opportunities, your network connections are more likely to understand your goals and skills. Their belief in your potential can boost your confidence, helping you take the plunge into a supervisory position.

**2. People with leadership experience in your network can provide invaluable insights.**

A quick conversation with someone who has been in a similar role can clarify responsibilities and expectations that might not be apparent from the job description. Learning from their experiences can better prepare you for potential challenges. Consider seeking formal sponsorship from leaders you admire. They can provide a sounding board for your ideas and valuable second opinions.

**3. Your professional network is a rich resource for developing leadership skills.**

Observe how others in your network handle situations and consider how you can apply those skills in your context. Additionally, attend seminars, subscribe to newsletters like *Harvard Business Review's* "Management Tip of the Day" and engage with leadership communities on social media. Influential public intellectuals like Daniel Goleman, Adam Grant, Brené Brown and Simon Sinek offer valuable advice on developing leadership skills.

To make the most of your professional network, take the time to reflect on what you are learning and, most importantly, how you are feeling. Transformative learning often occurs when you turn disorienting moments of uncertainty into opportunities for growth. Embrace these moments to gain deeper insights, capitalize on your strengths and develop strategies to address any gaps.

## **Building your own network**

If you're worried about finding people with leadership experience in your network, we have a few practical strategies to help you expand it:

1. **Keep track of people you meet.** Whether you meet people at work or other places, take the time to learn about them and connect with them afterwards — tools like LinkedIn can help.
2. **Use every opportunity to stay in touch.** Use opportunities like lunch breaks, coffee meetings or shared events to build and maintain relationships.
3. **Maintain a people-centred philosophy.** Build relationships for the sake of the relationship itself, viewing any benefits as secondary. Use curiosity and good judgment, and consider giving first without expecting anything in return. This mindset will help you develop genuine and long-lasting relationships.
4. **Look for win-win collaborations.** Think about how you might add value to their career. Seasoned leaders might be curious about your thoughts on workplace trends like using AI and supervising in the post-COVID era. You have something to contribute — just listen closely to understand what matters to them.
5. **Leverage introductions from your network.** Try to use the superpower of your “friend’s friends.” Having someone vouch for you can boost your credibility and make a strong first impression.



Use opportunities like coffee meetings to build and maintain relationships in the workplace.  
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## Don't be afraid to leap

In the end, you might never feel 100 per cent ready for leadership, but don't shy away from a fantastic opportunity to expand your skills and relationships.

As Leda discovered, leveraging her professional network was instrumental in navigating her early leadership challenges and ultimately turning that experience into a pivotal moment in her career. The rewards are many, and those in supervisory roles often say they'd never look back despite the steep learning curves.

Reach out, build those connections and let others help you get to where you want to go. Embrace the journey, learn from every interaction, and you'll find that the support of your network can make all the difference.

Leadership is not a solitary path — it's one built on relationships, insights and mutual growth. So, take the leap. Your professional network is ready to support you in making your next big career move!